

Editorial

Longer hours won't lead to better learning

"Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind."

—Plato, *The Republic*

You can lead a kid to school, but you can't make him think.

You can try. You can lock him in class for seven hours a day, 200 to 220 days a year. You can make him take tests in order to advance to another grade. You can sit back and relax, thinking that if he didn't get it by now, he'd stay there until he did.

Terrel H. Bell, U.S. secretary of education, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education in August 1981. He directed the commission to prepare a public report on the quality of education in America and what could be done to improve it. On April 26, 1983, the commission reported its findings.

For the most part, the commission focused on high school education and teen-age students.

Among many recommendations dealing with curricula, college entrance

standards, textbooks and teaching, the suggestions that raised the most ruckus concerned the "time" element. The commission suggested that school districts and state legislatures "should strongly consider" a longer school day and school year.

The commission puts forth, as one argument, the same old materialistic, capitalistic hoopla heard so often during the Reagan administration.

"History is not kind to idlers," the report said. "We live among determined, educated and strongly motivated competitors. America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure... it is no longer."

The report goes on to mention Japanese cars, South Korean steel mills and German tools, all of which are more efficient than the American counterparts which were once "the pride of the world."

If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system... the report said.

It goes on to include "intellectual, moral and spiritual" concerns, but the thrust is as stated. High school students seem to be regarded more as raw materials to feed the Great American Industry/Tech Machine, than as individuals who graduate from high school unprepared for college or the job market. If the raw materials are of poor quality, so the finished product will be. The answer?

Keep the little buggers in school until they're ready to join the rest of us in the meatgrinder. After all, the commission found that schools in "other industrialized countries" (the ones making better cars and tools) have eight-hour school days, 220 days a year.

American students spend a paltry six hours a day, 180 days a year in school.

That's probably one of the reasons Detroit can't seem to come up with a longer-lasting car with higher gas mileage.

That sort of logic sends chills up and down the spine.

It's like telling a sick person that if two aspirins can cure a headache, "a hundred or so ought to fix up that brain tumor just fine."

The Innoculation Theory of Education: If it doesn't take in six hours, better keep giving them booster shots.

As future educators, parents, employers and colleagues of students now and in the future, it is time to re-examine the roles and responsibilities of our schools. It is time to discard well-worn traditions and re-evaluate the assumptions our system is based on. No one questions the fact that there are real problems in our schools, their methods and priorities. But to hold with archaic concepts like "everyone wants to learn, we just have to keep them in school until they do" is preposterous.

—Mona Z. Koppelman

A two-part series of articles beginning Wednesday will study and compare the national commission's report and a report by Nebraska's Task Force on Excellence in Education concluded Sept. 30, 1983.

UNL money scam enrages governor

In the Friday's Omaha World-Herald, a Page One story reported that our Gov. Kerrey is more than just a little miffed at UNL. While he was touring a syringe plant in Columbus, the plant manager, James George, complained to Kerrey that the university actually wanted to charge him for some consulting he had asked them to do.



Mike Frost

When he returned to Lincoln, Kerrey called a meeting of his advisers to discuss the matter.

Their faces were grim. They had seen Gov. Kerrey mad before, but never quite this mad.

"I'm as mad as a frog who just tried to eat Rodan," Kerrey said. "I just got back from Columbus, where somebody told me that UNL charges money for research it does."

A collective shudder filled the room. An aide named Smith piped up, "Charged money? Is that, like, legal?"

"I don't know if it's illegal, but it certainly sounds immoral," the Governor replied. "That's why I'm appointing you, Jones, Roberts and Dickens to a special commission to look into this matter. I want you to find out the extent of the university charging for things."

The court reported back to the governor the following week. Smith, being a rather gregarious fellow, spoke for the group. "Sir, we found literally hundreds of examples of UNL charging for basic services," he said.

"First, we discovered a little scam known as 'tuition.'"

"Tuition?" Kerrey queried.

"Yes, it seems that the university makes students pay for the classes they take. In essence, then, they are charging for an education."

Kerrey paled. "The heartless blackmailers!" he exclaimed.

"We also found several services the university forces its students to pay for. Books, food, shelter — they charge for food and shelter! These are animals we are dealing with, Smith, not human beings."

"There's even a game room in their student union," Smith continued. "Governor, they charge students for pinball."

"Fascist pigs," Kerrey bellowed.

"The list continues. Registration, parking, theater tickets, football games —"

"They charge people to see a football game! Smith, what is it they do with all this money?"

Smith shuffled through his report. "As far as we can tell, all they do is educate."

Kerrey's eyes glanced heaven-wards. "A colossal waste of money. Thank you, men, you did a fine job. I'll make you all members of the Nebraska Navy for this. With the information you have gathered, I'll be able to force UNL to justify every penny it takes in and spends. Is there anything else?"

"Well, there is the matter of us getting paid for this," Smith said.

"How much?"

"\$700,000."

"Take it out of 'Misc. Expenses.'"



Computer mail delivery is no fun

One of those companies with the soul of a microchip has come up with a new service: electronic mail. For a fee, the company will transmit a written message from the computer screen in your home or office — virtually any brand of computer — to the computer screen in your friend's or colleague's home or office.

If the whole thing works, I'm sure the company will have a success on its hands. I don't think I'm going to be a customer, though.



Bob Greene

I'm a romantic about mail. The moment the mail carrier arrives with his bundle has always been a high point of my day.

In the days before the postal service became so dismal, it was even sort of fun to guess which day a certain letter would arrive. If you knew that someone was supposed to write you on, say, Monday, you would hope that the letter arrived Tuesday; if it didn't, though, you knew it would be showing up on Wednesday.

Now, alas, nothing is so certain. I no longer drop a letter into a mailbox with any sense of assurance that it's going to end up where I want it to. The odds are in the letter's favor, of course — when you come to think of it, the task the post office carries out in dealing with the number of items it handles daily is impressive even in light of its glaring mishaps — but if you really want a specific letter to reach someone, you can be sure that's the letter destined to disap-

pear into a black hole somewhere.

The overnight delivery services are a fine solution. I have used them on a regular basis for about three years now, and I am delighted with them. They're expensive when you compare them with the cost of a regular first-class stamp; but if there's something you want someone else to have, and you want to go to bed knowing he or she is going to get it, then the overnight services are your ticket.

So that's what I do. For most letters, drop them in the mailbox, take a deep breath, and hope they get there one of these days. For the occasional letter I really care about, an overnight service that will get it there by the middle of the following day.

Which brings us to the new electronic delivery service. In theory, it sounds great. Computer-to-computer delivery, right away.

In my office, though, we already have an in-house electronic delivery system. If someone in the office wants to send a memo to someone else in the office, he can do it right on his computer. There is a special "message" function that takes care of it.

It's no fun. All the personality and humanity that show up in letters disappear on computer screens. There's no such thing as handwriting; it doesn't matter who sent you the message — it always comes out in those efficient bright green letters on the black background. A message from the president of the firm looks the same as a message from a clerk in the stockroom, which looks the same as a message from an unseen and anonymous flirt; all the warmth and wisdom are translated into those frigid, uniform green characters. Reading messages on your computer screen is not like strolling through a sunlit and dusty variety store; it's like being trapped in an endless, spotless corridor inside the Pentagon.

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